
Residential Homeowner's Guideline

A homeowner's guide to the residential
permitting process in the City of Houston



City of Houston
Code Enforcement Branch

Introduction

Applying for a building permit in the City of Houston can be a complicated and daunting process that frustrates even the most prepared homeowner. This guide is intended to provide some helpful and relevant information to make the homeowner's experience easier. Before starting, a couple of things to consider...

Exemptions

If your project consists of only the following, you do **NOT** need a permit:

- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, flooring, cabinets*, countertops and similar finish work
- Interior trim & similar work
- Wood or metal fences less than 8 feet tall
- Siding that does not exceed 128 square feet
- Uncovered decks under 30 inches high
- Storage sheds less than 120 sq. feet
- Repair of exterior wood fascia, trim & soffits
- Roof covering that does not exceed 100 sq. feet

*While cabinets do not require a permit, replacement of plumbing or electrical fixtures will require permitting.

Project Planning & Considerations



If your project consists of more than the above, here are some questions you should ask before beginning your project:

- ? Can I financially and legally build the proposed project?
- ? Are there any issues such as deed restrictions and property liens?
- ? What are the survey and property lines and will the structure fit within the boundaries of the proposed location?
- ? Are the required utilities available? Is storm water & wastewater capacity sufficient or is more needed?
- ? Does the property need platting? (may be required if there is a change in use or addition on the property)
- ? Is the property located in the floodplain? Additional inspections are required by the Floodplain Management Office.

Design Requirements

Defining the Scope of Work

Listed below are common terms used to describe the scope of work on a particular project. This is for clarification purposes, as there are multiple ways of describing the same kind of work.

- **New Construction** - Ground up construction, Foundation move-in
- **Addition** - Square footage added to an existing structure (ex. adding a game room to the first floor of a house)
- **Remodel** - Alteration of an existing building (ex. rearranging interior walls to create more space in a bathroom)
- **Repair** - Replacement of same materials in a structure (ex. replacing sheet rock wall)

Applicable Codes

When getting your plans together, it is important to make sure that your plans are based on relevant building codes. Listed below are the current City of Houston codes and amendments. You can also view these from the link provided below:

- 2006 International Residential Code
- 2009 International Energy Conservation Code
- Various Codes of Ordinance Sections
- <http://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/code-enforcement/publications.html/#houston>



Basic Code Requirements

- Location on property – 3' typical unless rated construction
- Minimum 1 door 3'0" wide and 6'8" tall
- Egress windows required out of bedrooms
- Stairs – Tread max. 7¼ inch rise and 10" min. depth; Headroom 6' 8" min. typical
- Smoke Detectors are required in each bedroom and in hallways near bedrooms; interconnection required
- Public sidewalks are typically required to be constructed by the builder
- Handrails must be between 34" -38" & Guardrails 36" in height minimum and 4" openings maximum
- Lighting, ventilation & sanitation facilities are required

Licensing & Registration

Who can purchase permits and when?

- The **building** permit may be purchased by the owner, an agent or the contractor. General contractors are not required to be licensed by the City of Houston.
- Trade permits can be purchased by licensed contractors after the building permit has been sold. In some cases a homeowner may be able to purchase a trade permit. For more information, please contact us at 832-394-9494.

Electrical

- Master electrician must be licensed by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) and be registered with the City of Houston. All electrical permits must be purchased by a master electrician.

Mechanical

- Air conditioning contractor must have a type A or B license from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation and be registered with the City of Houston. In some instances a mechanical permit may be obtained by the homeowner.

Plumbing

- Master plumber must be licensed by the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners (TSBPE) and be registered with the City of Houston. In some instances, the plumbing permit may be obtained by the homeowner.

Sidewalk/Driveway

- Only a bonded contractor with \$2,000 surety bond may pull this permit, although the homeowner may purchase permits in instances where a curb cut is not required.



The Permit Process

Application

Applying for a building permit is a multiple step process. The first step is to fill out the Building Permit Application and obtain a project number from the Permit Office. There are a few items to think about while filling out the application:

- ☐ There is an affidavit that needs to be signed by the owner verifying whether there are deed restrictions on the property and whether the project is in compliance of restrictions. Copies of deed restrictions may be obtained from your Homeowner's Association or the County Clerk's Office. The Harris County Clerk's Office can be contacted at 713-755-6405.
- ☐ Addresses need to be verified at the Permit Office for new construction projects.
- ☐ A valuation of the project is required before receiving a project number. Valuation is defined as "the total cost of construction to the end user, excluding the land purchase costs and the overhead attributed to the land purchase. The value of donated goods and services is included."

Plan Review

Once a project number has been assigned, there are two options; plans can be submitted (typical for new construction projects) or plans can be walked through One Stop plan review (see restrictions below) and the building permit issued in the same day assuming all requirements are met. Below is a chart that indicates the various department reviews dependent on the scope of work:

Project Type	Planning	Taps & Meters	One Stop ²	Flood ³	Traffic
New construction ¹	✓	✓		✓	
Addition	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Remodel		✓	✓	✓	
Garage/Carport (new)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Repair			✓	✓	
Fence	✓		✓	✓	
Driveway/Sidewalk	✓		✓	✓	✓

1 Plans must be submitted for review 2 Plans must be reviewable in 30 min. or less to qualify

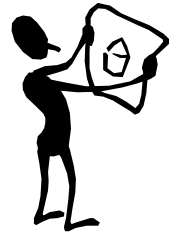
3 Flood applicable if project is in a flood plain

Code Enforcement Plan Review Requirements

As projects vary greatly, so do the plan review requirements needed when going through residential plan review department. Listed below are the requirements based on the scope of the work.

New Construction/ Additions/ Garages & Carports

- ☞ Two (2) complete set of plans with all dimensions and materials clearly indicated
 - Survey by Texas Registered surveyor or a complete site plan with dimensions showing: Existing property lines, Easements, Building Setback Line and Proposed Building.
 - Foundation plans: needed if a project includes a new foundation. Dimensions shall include beams and steel bars with foundation conditions noted on plans.
 - Floor plans: For additions indicate footprint of existing building and show in detail new addition/affected area with location of partitions, windows and doors.
 - Elevation plans
 - Door and window schedule shown on plans
 - Wall section details
 - Roofing and framing plan indicating purlins, ceiling joists and rafters
 - Trusses (when applicable)
- ☞ Energy Code Forms
- ☞ Grading and Fill Worksheet (Form 1094)
- ☞ Wind strapping information
- ☞ Calculation of Impervious Cover Percentage (Form 1207)



Remodel

- ☞ Energy Code Form
- ☞ Two sets of plans which include:
 - Floor plan of existing building and show in detail affected area
 - Materials used
 - Wall section details to determine bearing and non-load bearing walls
 - Demolition of any load bearing walls will need additional requirements to determine direction of ceiling joists, and the location of header and beam

Repair

- ☞ Requires Residential Repair Spec List (Form 1059)
- ☞ Roof repairs only require a Re-Roof worksheet (Form 1109)

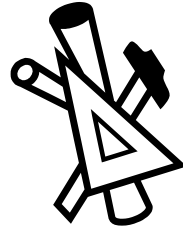
Other Department Review Requirements

Before the plans are examined by a residential plan analyst, other departments will check to ensure your project meets the necessary requirements. As noted previously, not all projects are required to be reviewed by all departments as the scope of work will determine which reviews are necessary.

Planning & Development – Reviews development site plans for compliance with the City Code of Ordinances (Chapter 42), parking regulations (Chapter 26), tree and shrub regulations (Chapter 33); property setbacks (Chapter 42).

***New construction and addition projects**

- ☞ Site plan
 - Drawn to scale
 - Show building setback lines
 - Show all existing and proposed structures
- ☞ Survey (one copy)
- ☞ Landscape analysis form
- ☞ Recorded subdivision plat (one copy)



Utility Analysis – Responsible for managing wastewater flows through wastewater capacity reservations (WCR), managing water demands through water/storm drainage commitment letters, reviewing information on water, wastewater and storm drainage requirements for new development or for existing development that will require additional water and/or wastewater capacity.

***New construction and projects that include plumbing**

- ☞ Wastewater Capacity Reservation Letter (WCR)
 - **Short form (same day):** if project is ≤ 6 service units, fronted by a sanitary sewer line ≥ 8 inches and a water line ≥ 6 inches.
 - **Long form (avg. 10 to 12 calendar days)**
- ☞ Issues Impact Fee Receipt if fees are applicable
- ☞ Issues Impact Fee Exemption if fees do not apply
- ☞ Taps & Meters Plan Review verifies requirements of WCR application after application is approved

Floodplain Management — Manages all development in the flood plain by reviewing plans, monitoring and inspecting construction activities as required by the Code of Ordinances. An archive of historic Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) panels that are no longer “effective”, as determined by FEMA, are maintained by this office.

- 📄 Elevation Certificates (must be signed & sealed)
 - When plans are submitted
 - Prior to Framing Inspection
 - Prior to Final Inspection
- 📄 Mitigation Plan
- 📄 Site Topography Survey
- 📄 Finish floor elevations of all slabs
- 📄 Cut and fill areas (must be shaded)
- 📄 Appliances (mechanical, electrical & plumbing) must be 1 foot above BFE (Base Flood Elevation)
- 📄 Water resistant material & flood vents (for areas below the BFE)



Traffic — Reviews plans for driveways, sidewalks, and culvert parking lots, issues permits for private street paving work, and addresses right-of-way issues.

- 📄 Plans or drawings drawn to scale are required and must show:
 - Existing and proposed driveways
 - Location of driveway to nearest neighbor common property line
 - Widths of:
 - Sidewalks
 - Ditches
 - Culverts
 - Existing trees, storm inlets and location of edge of pavement
 - Center line of ditch & radius or taper of the driveway
- 📄 Minimum culvert size is 24” RCP (reinforced concrete pipe) or HDPE (high-density polyethelene) X width of driveway

Storm Water — Ensures that site drainage complies with all mandated policies directing runoff to the city right-of-way and may not overflow to an adjacent property.

- 📄 Detailed site drainage plan
- 📄 Single family residences on lots 15,000 sq. ft. or more require a Letter of Storm Availability attached to plans.
- 📄 Some sites require Detention/Storage plans by a Professional Engineer per the Letter of Storm Availability.

Required Inspections

Once you have obtained the necessary permits, you can begin work on your project. During construction, approved “red stamped” plans and permits must be on site for inspections. Failure to do so will result in automatic failure of scheduled inspections. Inspection schedule is listed below:

Structural Inspections

- ✘ Pier/Foundation – Call before placement of concrete
- ✘ Windstorm – Call prior to exterior sheathing installation to verify fasteners / straps
- ✘ Frame – Call after MEP rough-ins and prior to installing insulation and sheetrock. *Note: Truss plans should be approved at this time!
- ✘ Lath / Brick Tie – Call after frame inspection has been approved
- ✘ Insulation – Call after frame inspection has been approved
- ✘ Building Final – Call after the entire project has been completed to verify that all life safety and grading items have been installed and are working properly



Electrical Inspections

- ✘ Ditch cover - Call when underground conduit is put in
- ✘ Rough in – Call when walls and ceiling are wired
- ✘ TCI - Call when temporary power is needed to check wiring
- ✘ Meter Loop Services / Final - Call after all work is completed

Plumbing Inspections

- ✘ Ground, Sewer, Water Service, Storm Drainage, Lawn Sprinklers - Call before pipes are covered
- ✘ Rough in – Call before sheetrock is installed
- ✘ Gas / Final – Call when work is complete

Mechanical Inspections

- ✘ Duct Seal, Cover, Grille Seal - Call before insulation and sheetrock is installed
- ✘ Final – Call after work is complete

Project Closing

As final inspections are approved, there are a few items to fulfill before your project is considered closed and completed.

Utility Releases

Gas and electrical inspection approvals are released to Centerpoint Energy (unless otherwise noted) after the final building inspection and all required holds are approved. Permanent service to either may be granted in these situations:

- ✦ Permanent electrical service may be granted before final inspection approvals if there is a Temporary Cut-In (TCI) permit purchased by the Master Electrician and the required inspection approval.
- ✦ Permanent gas service may be granted if a Temporary Gas (PG) permit has been purchased by the master plumber and gas test approval has been approved.
- ✦ A Request for Utilities form needs to be filled out by either the owner or a general contractor. This form can be faxed to the Utility Release section at 832-394-9618 or dropped off at the Houston Permitting Center on 1002 Washington Avenue on the first floor.
- ✦ All applicable trade permits must be purchased which include electrical, plumbing, HVAC and the sidewalk/driveway permit.

Certificate of Compliance

While not required, a Certificate of Compliance may be obtained after all inspections have been approved. This certificate indicates that all inspections have been approved and that the residence may be occupied.

- ☞ Certificates may be purchased with the building permit or at any time before the project is closed and utilities released.
- ☞ Once all final inspections have been approved, you may request the certificate through the Utility Release section by calling 832-394-8847 or coming to 1002 Washington Avenue on the first floor.
- ☞ If requests are made before 12 p.m., the certificate may be picked up after 3 p.m. the same day, otherwise the certificate will not be ready until 3 p.m. the next business day.

Contact Information

For additional information, please feel free to contact us at 832-394-9494 or email us at rmcacd@houstontx.gov.

Useful numbers

General Information	832-394-9494
Residential Plan Review	832-394-8820
Planning	832-394-8849
Taps and Meters	832-394-8888
Automated Inspection Line	713-222-9922
Open Records	832-394-8800
Floodplain Management	832-394-8854
Traffic Plan Review	832-394-8851
Storm Plan Review	832-394-8810



Website information

Code Enforcement Homepage	www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/code-enforcement.html
Permits/Inspections/Plan Review	http://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/city-of-houston-permits/online-permits.html
Planning & Development	www.houstonplanning.com
Public Works & Engineering Main Webpage	www.publicworks.houstontx.gov
City of Houston Main Webpage	www.houstontx.gov
General Information	www.houstontx.gov/311
Flood Maps	www.tsarp.org